

ON THE STREETS WHERE YOU LIVE



Cumberland Avenue

Prior to the building of Epping Road in the 1930s, Cumberland Avenue (off Mowbray Road) provided access to the Cumberland Paper Board Mills, an iconic landmark on the banks of the Lane Cove River. The factory provided employment for many local families and supplied much of the state's paper and cardboard needs. Three significant fires at the site led to its final closure after just 15 years of operation.

The papermaking mill at Lane Cove was opened by Prime Minister, Joseph Cook on 24 October 1913. It was situated on 105 acres of land which included parts of Stringybark Creek. A dam wall built on the creek created a lake for the storage of water needed for paper production. Large brick buildings were erected for mill spaces and a power house. Machinery was imported from Edinburgh, along with a chief engineer and nine experienced British workmen and their families. A long concrete wharf was also built to allow for the transport of raw materials and finished paper products via the river.

The outbreak of World War I further increased the demand for locally produced paper and cardboard products. The capacity of the plant was doubled and additional machinery was imported from the United States. The company offered job protection for their enlisting employees after the war.

In January 1914, fire destroyed the mill's storage sheds and all the contents. The mill itself was undamaged but did shut down for two weeks. The inaccessibility of the site by road, caused great problems for the local fire brigades attending and workers fleeing the fire. The damage was estimated at £10,000 and was fully covered by insurance.

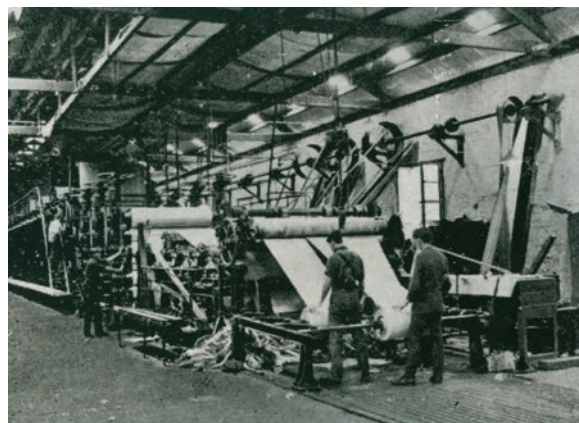
During 1916 the company assisted the war effort with a scheme for recycling waste paper, old books and newspapers. In December 1918 three storage sheds containing paper pulp, compressed papers and other raw materials, were destroyed by fire. Bushfires nearby intensified the heat of the blaze, again creating great difficulty for fire brigades from Lane Cove, Crows Nest, Willoughby, Balmain and Glebe. The estimated £50,000 loss was again covered by insurance.

The factory continued to grow and by 1921 it employed over 200 men and 80 women and produced 350 tons of paper products a week. A shortage of raw materials, waste paper and imported wood pulp resulted in a production decrease in 1922.

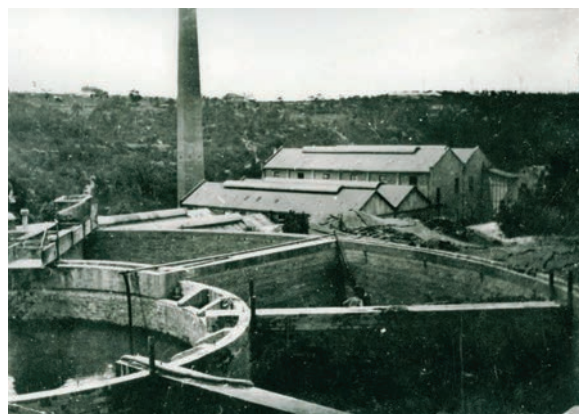
A third fire in October 1928 totally destroyed the mills. On a day of oppressive heat and sweeping westerly winds, the mill caught fire and burned all through the night. Bushfires surrounded the mill site again making it impossible for fire engines to adequately reach the mill for many hours. Some engines were loaded on punts to gain access from the riverside but were hampered by shallow water and couldn't reach the fire until the next high tide. The fire burnt for

several days. Despite initial statements that the mill would be rebuilt from the ruins, a decision was made to close and 230 employees lost their jobs. The land and remnant buildings were sold to the chemical manufacturers, Robert Corbert Pty. Ltd.

In May 1981 the 40 metre chimney stack built in 1912 for the Cumberland Paper Board Mills was demolished. The stack resisted three attempts with explosive charges at the base and was finally brought to the ground with the fourth blast. It was demolished to make way for a new complex for S. C. Johnson.



*Dry end of a machine at the Cumberland Paper Board Mills, circa 1920
(Courtesy of D. Smith/Lane Cove Library)*



*Cumberland Paper Board Mills, Lane Cove, taken from the Mars Road side of the gully, circa 1923
(Courtesy of D. Smith/Lane Cove Library)*

